

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## INTERIOR DEPARTMENT TO CURTAIL ACQUISITION OF WETLANDS FOR WATERFOWL IN NORTH DAKOTA

Interior Department programs to acquire wetland habitat for waterfowl in North Dakota will be severely curtailed unless restrictions imposed by the State on such acquisitions are removed, Robert L. Herbst, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, has announced.

In a letter sent to North Dakota Governor Arthur A. Link on September 22, Herbst said that a law passed in 1977 by the State legislature had left the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with no alternative but to cease acquisition of easements (leases) on wetlands in North Dakota. Herbst also termed "unacceptable" additional restrictions recently imposed by the Governor on fee title acquisitions (outright purchases). He said that the Fish and Wildlife Service would not be able to make any more fee title purchases unless Governor Link removed or did not enforce the new restrictions.

Curtailment of the Fish and Wildlife Service wetlands acquisition program in North Dakota could have significant effects on future numbers of ducks in the United States, according to Service biologists. Six to seven million adult ducks breed in the prairie wetlands of North Dakota and surrounding States each year--more than any other area in the country except Alaska. Prairie wetlands, however, are being rapidly destroyed. Recent estimates indicate that some 15 to 20 thousand acres of prairie wetlands are being drained annually in North Dakota, mostly by private landowners.

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